

The Digital Time of Internet Art

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Signal Effects I

Digital Ecologies and the Anthropocene

Media Convergence Research Centre, Bath Spa University

April 2017

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Galloway in his 2004 book *Protocol* highlights a moment from philosopher Gilles Deleuze's 1990 interview with fellow philosopher Antonio Negri. Deleuze writes: "Each kind of society corresponds to a particular kind of machine – with simple mechanical machines corresponding to sovereign societies, thermodynamic machines to disciplinary societies, cybernetic machines and computers to control societies". According to Deleuze, computers are historically concurrent with control societies. What Deleuze refers to in 1990 as "computers" we can examine today at internet technology and the web. The internet has enabled a massive shift in communications, sociality, knowledge production and politics. It has created a new era by providing the technological basis for the organisational form of the information age, the network (Castells 1996). This is the first technology to achieve global scope, so it is today more than ever that we can imagine the world as a whole. At the same time, this is the first technology that allows human information processing close to real life situations through virtual reality, while it is also the first technology that provides us with time-shifting tools and time-control over lived experiences. Through this

massive shift from enclosed structures to entangled systems is how our current conditions of experiencing life through the internet are being formed. As it is expected, culture changes along with technology, and today, the ubiquity of internet technology has re-invented the way we perceive and thus, the way we go about experiencing art and art-making. As cultural production takes place online, contemporary internet art – postinternet art- transforms our way of thinking art by challenging the nature and the life of the artwork itself.

Artist and curator Marisa Olson used the phrases "after the internet" and "postinternet" beginning in 2006. Olson's use of the term of postinternet implies an ability to stand outside the internet to some extent. The term has changed and it has come to stand less for a clear demarcation of "before" and "after" than to represent a continuously evolving critical dialogue. Postinternet art is the evolution of net.art. Net.art or simply internet art as net artist Olia Lialina describes it is about "the internet being open for artistic self-expression, that the time had come to create net films, net stories and so on, to develop a net language instead of using the web simply as a broadcast channel". Net.art introduced works that used the internet as their medium which in turn defined the subject matter and the nature of these works. This is art that cannot be experienced in any other way. Internet defines both the place and time of the work as well as the reason for its existence. Much of today's artistic practice identifies itself as "postinternet". As Artie Vierkant describes in his 2010 essay *The Image Object Post-Internet* [6] "we can try to characterise this shift from internet art to postinternet art as the time when artists are acting less as interpreters, transcribers, narrators, curators and architects and more as fully-implicated participants. For artist Marisa Olson, postinternet has a specific meaning, referring to a mode of artistic activity drawing on raw materials and ideas found or developed online. Postinternet artworks are not simply made online or for online use, instead they reflect the state of the world today by operating online and by adopting, borrowing and exploiting every aspect that makes the internet what it is today. This can be its applications, services, culture, networks, societies, technical innovations,

limitations and information amongst others. This paper examines how we can examine digital time through postinternet art, an art that is fully immersed in online conditions and acts as the perfect example of a product inspired from, produced for and existing online.

DIGITAL TIME

Digital time is the time that is describable by information or the time that relates to internet conditions affects postinternet art in two major ways. First, the physical life of the artwork and second, the time-based element of the artwork. By physical life I refer to the length of time that an artwork would last. Object-based works depend on their materials and preservation techniques and tactics for continuing to exist in their artist-intended form. Non-object-based artworks like performances and happenings' physical life depend on the artist's intentions, as well as, the documentation and archiving techniques of their time. As postinternet art is predominantly created to exist online, its physical life transcends notions of material deterioration and instead enters a dependent relationship with the medium's capacity for self-preservation. This means that as long as internet technologies continue to exist and evolve, postinternet artworks will also continue to live online. Postinternet artworks can have various and multifarious forms. They can be online performances, websites, videos and images meant to be experienced online, chat conversations and interactions and video calls amongst others. Their material is virtual and once they've entered the online world they will continue to exist in some form or another. Even if their links are broken or they are being intentionally removed from the web by their creators, it is impossible to delete every trace of online information. Pieces of information exist on various servers and computers which are part of the internet and even if someone tried to delete any relevant information from all the sites and services that might host data about an artwork, there is no guarantee that these websites and services have not already communicated that information to third parties. Finally, once an artwork is being communicated online it enters the public sphere and whatever comment and reference relevant to it will always come up in searches. This means that what we understand as the physical life of an artwork takes a new meaning when talking about postinternet art.

The physical life of an artwork has nothing to do with the artist's intentions, its material durability, or even archival and preservation techniques of our time. Instead it is entirely linked to time being defined by internet's digital conditions and can only be described by information. Information through internet technologies that is related to

data and knowledge. Data represents values attributed to parameters, and knowledge signifies understanding of things or abstract concepts. Postinternet art can then be understood as associated with the data and information that exists online as long as it does.

Another important change between media art and internet-based art is that of their time-based condition. Time-based media art refers to works of art that depend on technology and have duration as a dimension [tate]. This can be artworks that use video, film, audio, 35mm slide, and computer-based technologies. Artist's choice of presentation through media directly effects the way in which the work can be experienced and preserved. Having duration as a dimension means that the artwork is being unfold to the viewer over time. Time-based media depend entirely on their technological medium and their preservation depends on industry decisions to discontinue particular technologies. These artworks only really exist in their installed state and so information about their display also needs to be preserved in order for the work to be recreated in the future. Time-based media also includes performances regardless of their use of technology, as well as, installations. Performances are by nature time-based and their preservation depends a great deal on the artist's documentation choices. The same applies for installations. In Tino Sehgal's installation *This is propaganda*, 2002, the artist did not allow for any form of documentation to happen (photographs, videos, text etc.) to avoid that these might, in the future come to stand-in for the work [tate]. Instead, Sehgal chooses to teach the owners of his works how to install them. This way the work lives on the memory of the relevant participants until the next time that will be installed.

Postinternet art does not simply uses technology, it appropriates the internet in the sense that it appropriates internet technologies and web content. This means that although it can be considered to be time-based art in the sense that duration is a dimension of the work, time itself has a different meaning. Since internet artworks can exist online – in one way or the other – forever, the time-based element of internet art as something that evolves and unfolds over time enters the reality of digital time which means that its unfolding and evolving through time is being re-defined by online interconnections. As art is part of social structure and as internet art forms keep changing, their historical context is continually re-evaluated. However the historical context of internet art is now being defined by the artworks connections to online data and information. Meaning that traces of the artwork's location online and

information that has been shared and circulated about it will always filter the historical context since search engines reflect a reality tailored by what internet publishers and users deem popular, interesting and important. EXAMPLE Artworks exists in an infinite state of constant access, re-play and playback and uncontrollable trace. It links back to digital time being defined by data and information. By examining the life conditions of contemporary internet art we can reveal more about how our understanding of time changes through internet technology.

When reflecting on how contemporary internet art escapes its physical life by existing in relation to data and information and how art's time-based element is being redefined by internet technologies, we can begin to examine digital time as what Timothy Morton describes as a hyperobject. Digital time being time with no physical restrictions, as well as, being defined in relation to information that is linked to data and knowledge is so massively distributed within networked systems of information that defies our perception or control. What exists in and through digital time – and internet art is a great example as it is being created for and relates to the online world – defies its physical life, fights its own extinction and continuously redefines its world of associations. Digital time completely challenges our normal ways of experiencing, making and evaluating art, and suggest that we should reinvent how we think about art altogether.

VIII. REFERENCES

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